Chapter 4
Embodiment: Prefiguration and Synecdochal Representation

When on 25 January 2011 Egyptian revolutionaries occupied Tahrir Square, no one could have predicted that the image of the occupied square would become such an important signifier for protest and contestation in the ensuing years. Throughout the following decade, the example of Tahrir Square would continue to inspire many occupy movements around the world: from the Spanish 15-M movement and the Greek anti-austerity movement to Occupy Wall Street (OWS), and from the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul and the so-called 'Umbrella Revolution' in Hong Kong, to Nuit Debout in Paris. Notwithstanding the obvious differences between these movements, they clearly did refer to each other – and to the iconic occupation of Tahrir Square in particular – as an important source of inspiration (Graeber 2013: 237). But obviously, the occupied Tahrir Square not only had an important symbolic value to many protesters around the world; for many Egyptian people, the 'Republic of Tahrir' and its temporary inhabitants also embodied the grievances and hopes of a significant part of their country's population. To them, the people assembled on this square were the true representatives of the popular will (Frank 2021: 70–1). One may argue that even Hosni Mubarak implicitly acknowledged this when he finally gave in to the protesters' demand and announced his resignation.

But if those assembled on Tahrir Square (or any other occupied square, for that matter) can indeed be understood to have represented the people at large, then what concept of representation was implied here? After all, they clearly did not have a formal mandate to speak or act on behalf of 'the people'. This is even more complex in the context of recent movements such as OWS and the 15-M movement, which were often very critical of electoral-representative democracy, as it prevents citizens from actively partaking in democratic politics.

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As argued in the previous chapter, they sought to prefigure a more participatory and decentralised form of democracy. It is sometimes suggested that these movements were thus against political representation *tout court* (Lorey 2020; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014; Tormey 2015). However, it seems evident that their activist tent camps and prefigurative experiments also implied a strong representative claim in their own right (Saward 2010). These movements arguably did stand for something or for someone else – and arguably even spoke or acted for them. But this suggests that prefigurative democracy requires a very specific, non-mandated form of political representation.

How may prefigurative democracy be understood to challenge and alter our understanding of political representation? Although recent occupy movements such as OWS and 15-M were indeed very critical of electoral-representative government in its current state, this may not warrant the widespread claim that their prefigurative practices were entirely devoid of, or necessarily opposed to, any form of political representation. In the next section I first engage with this predominant reading of the occupy movements. Although many (but by no means all) of them indeed seem to have shared a critique of electoral-representative democracy in its current state, I argue, this should not be too easily equated with a dismissal of political representation *tout court*. But in order to appreciate this, we first need to gain more conceptual clarity on what exactly 'representation' means, since the term is used and defined in a myriad of ways. In the second section I therefore disentangle two different conceptions of representation. On the one hand, 'representation' is often understood as a relation in which one agent 'acts for' or on behalf of someone else – usually on the basis of a formal mandate. But on the other hand, it may also refer to a descriptive or symbolic relation, in which the represented acquires a particular meaning through the process of representation.

In the third section I apply these notions of representation as 'acting for' and 'standing for' to the politics of recent occupy movements, and argue why both are present (implicitly as well as explicitly) in their prefigurative practices and rhetoric. I then continue to develop a concept of non-mandated political representation as 'acting for' that is particularly important for our understanding of prefigurative democracy and the politics of recent occupy movements. Engaging with the political thought of Ernesto Laclau, I argue that this idea of representation has a typically synecdochal form. The synecdoche is a

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figure of speech in which a part is understood to 'stand for' a larger whole. Rather than being a mere symbolic or rhetorical form, the synecdoche also has an important political function in that it constitutes new shared discourses and identities. In the fifth section I further develop Laclau's concept of synecdochal representation in the context of recent occupy movements. I explore three features of prefigurative democracy that each have important synecdochal implications: the articulation of representative claims, the creation or reappropriation of commons, and the experimentation with participative democracy and decision-making. I reconstruct how these various features and their synecdochal implications played out in the rhetoric and prefigurative practices of recent occupy movements. These examples illustrate why synecdochal representation has a prefigurative function in its own right: whereas the whole is understood to be represented by one of its parts, it is this representative part that inscribes it with a particular meaning. Synecdochal representation thus takes as its referent the very social and political conditions that are co-constituted by the representative claim itself. In the concluding section I turn to contemporary debates on the relation between participatory or 'horizontalist' forms of democracy on the one hand, and representative or 'verticalist' forms on the other. Rather than belonging to one side of this dichotomy between horizontalism and verticalism, I argue, prefigurative democracy may instead be understood to combine these aspects. But first, let me engage with the contemporary theoretical debate on the representative role of recent occupy movements.

They Don't Represent Us? Occupy Movements and Representative Democracy

Consider this fragment from an 'FAQ' that was issued by the General Assembly of OWS:

> Occupy Wall Street is an exercise in 'direct democracy.' We feel we can no longer make our voices heard as we watch our votes for change usher in the same old power structure time and again. Since we can no longer trust our elected representatives to represent us rather than their large donors, we are creating a microcosm of what democracy *really* looks like. We do this to inspire one another to speak up. It is a reminder to our representatives and the moneyed interests that direct them: we the people still know our power. (New York City General Assembly 2011: 1)

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This text, like many of the statements issued and slogans used by occupy movements, is open to various interpretations. According to many political theorists and social movement scholars, it suggests that OWS defies representative government. The statement instead appeals to an image of 'what democracy *really* looks like': a more participatory form of democracy, which is juxtaposed to electoral-representative democracy in its current (and, indeed, flawed) state. These occupy movements therefore sought to prefigure alternative forms of democracy in practice. They used consensus-oriented decision-making procedures and forms of public deliberation (Cornell 2012; Polletta and Hoban 2016), set up General Assemblies and spokescouncils (Bray 2013; Graeber 2013), and organised through various alternative, online and offline networks (Castells 2015; Swann 2018). Thus perceived, these activist tent camps shaped a 'microcosm' in which its inhabitants' ideal of an alternative democratic society could be enacted.

In this respect, it should indeed not surprise us that these occupy movements, and more specifically their attempts to prefigure alternative democratic structures and practices, have often been understood to imply a rejection of representative democracy per se. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, these protesters did not merely contest particular neoliberal policies or austerity measures in the wake of the financial crisis; their critique of democracy in its current state struck at a much more fundamental level, since 'representative structures and liberal governance regimes [were] all thrown into question' (2012: 43–4). Some claim that this critique was not limited to electoral-representative democracy in its current state, as it more broadly applied to the logic of political representation *tout court*. Isabell Lorey presents these occupy movements as the most recent exponents of a typically 'presentist' view of democracy. They did not give any 're-presentation of the whole, unified people nor of a normative political idea' (2014: 60; see also Lorey 2020: 14–15), but instead sought to establish a more inclusive and participatory democratic practice in the present. The underlying assumption here is that 'representative democracy' is essentially an oxymoron. Representation categorically precludes the people from immediate participation in the political process (Hardt and Negri 2004: 244–5; Rancière 2006: 53; Tormey 2015: 149). 'Real democracy', on the other hand, presupposes a horizontalist conception of organisation and a rejection of 'representative democracy and the empowerment of leaders that such delegation of authority [entails]'

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(Sitrin 2012: 74). Seen from this perspective, then, these occupy movements were simply against any form of political representation. This would be evinced not only in their prefigurative experiments with participatory democracy and horizontal forms of organisation, but also by some of their most prominent slogans – such as 'This is what democracy looks like!', 'Real democracy now!' ('¡Democracia Real Ya!') and 'They don't represent us!' ('¡Que no nos representan!'). As Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzelini argue:

> 'They don't represent us!' has emerged as a powerful slogan in mobilizations all over the world. We hear it in the US, Spain, Greece, Brazil, Turkey, Slovenia, and even Russia. . . . The slogans are not phrased as rejections of specific political representatives, but as expressions of a *general rejection of the logic of representation*. (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014: 41, emphasis added)

Interestingly, a very similar analysis was made by some of these movements' most prominent critics. Chantal Mouffe argues that their reluctance to engage with any representative institutions or offices betrays a 'flawed understanding of politics' in general (2013: 78; see also Mouffe 2018: 20). Mouffe holds that a pluralist democracy simply 'cannot exist without representation', because political identities are the products of discursive articulation and representative claim-making (2013: 126). What these movements ought to challenge, she claims, is the fact that citizens today are no longer offered any alternatives to the hegemonic discourse – not representative democracy itself.

However, it is debatable to what extent the practices, slogans and aspirations of these movements were indeed underpinned by an unambiguous and principled rejection of any form of political representation (Flesher Fominaya 2020: 80). As we have seen in the previous chapter, even a renowned critic of representative democracy such as Arendt acknowledges that her 'council system' implies at least some forms of political representation and delegation (Kalyvas 2008: 282). What she, and arguably many recent occupy movements, take issue with is not so much political representation per se, but electoral-representative government in particular. As even some of its most prominent advocates insist, electoral representation is essentially elitist and inegalitarian since it requires 'the selection of representatives different from and perceived as superior to those who elect them' (Manin 1997: 149). This, Simon Tormey argues,

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is 'the metanarrative of representation: that our interests are best served if some represent and everyone else is represented' (Tormey 2015: 82). Electoral-representative government thus bestows upon some citizens the right to govern, whilst limiting the abilities of others to actively participate in politics (outside of the moment of election). It negates what Arendt calls *isonomia* – or the freedom of all citizens to partake in politics as each other's equals, without any form of hierarchy or rulership between them. What does not follow, however, is that a more participatory form of democracy must – or, indeed, could at all – be devoid of any form of political representation. Much like Arendt's and Luxemburg's revolutionary councils, these recent occupy movements arguably did stand for a larger 'people' or social group. Moreover, whilst slogans such as 'This is what democracy looks like!' or 'They don't represent us!' indeed suggest a critique of electoral-representative democracy in its current state, they arguably also imply a representative claim in their own right. Rather than a categorical dismissal of political representation, Paolo Gerbaudo argues, they should therefore 'be read as expressing a demand for better, and more direct and participatory representation to overcome the current "misrepresentation" of the people's will' (Gerbaudo 2017: 84).

What might such a more direct and participatory form of representation pertain to? Most likely, it should be more accessible or inclusive than electoral-representative government, which is inherently selective and hierarchical. Participation should be open to all, which also means that it must be based on a less formal and restrictive mandate than electoral representation. In the remainder of this chapter, I will reconstruct a conception of representation that is implied in prefigurative democracy and its participatory forms of organisation. But in order to do this we first need to acquire a better understanding of what exactly 'representation' means. As I will argue in the next section, this term tends to be employed in very different ways, which must be disentangled before they can be applied in the context of recent occupy movements.

Representation: The Various Uses of a Concept

What exactly *is* representation? As Hannah Pitkin argues in her seminal *The Concept of Representation*, the term tends to be used in very different ways, which are 'often intertwined, but their implications and consequences are very different' (1967: 59). Pitkin roughly

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divides the contemporary uses of the term into two different categories, according to a distinction that is made in some European languages, but not in others (Hofmann 1974: 19; Mulieri 2019; Sintomer 2013: 19–20; Spivak 1988: 276–7). In Dutch, German and Italian, for example, 'representation' may be translated as *vertegenwoordiging*, *Vertretung* or *rappresentanza*, respectively. This generally refers to the particular relation in which a representative (be it a politician, a delegate or a lawyer) speaks, negotiates, votes or even decides in someone else's stead. Pitkin calls this representation as 'acting for': 'the idea of substitution or acting instead of, the idea of taking care of or acting in the interest of, and the idea of acting as a subordinate, on instructions, in accord with the wishes of another' (1967: 139). Usually, representation as 'acting for' requires an explicit mandate – although there are also examples of non-mandated 'acting for' (Mansbridge 2003). In any case, it does require a certain degree of 'responsiveness': a representative 'must be responsive to [the represented] rather than the other way around' (Pitkin 1967: 140). Thus, the perceived legitimacy of a representative largely depends on their ability to adequately and accurately convey the opinions, grievances or interests of a particular group or constituency. This has two further implications. First, it follows that those represented must be understood to ontologically precede their representative – who, after all, is required to respond to the former's authentic grievances or interests. Second, it implies that there is a certain distance between representative and represented (Manin 1997). This concept of representation as 'acting for' is usually implied, for instance, in our common understanding of electoral-representative democracy.

However, all of the aforementioned languages also have a *second* term commonly translated as 'representation' – namely, *representatie*, *Darstellung* or *rappresentazione*. This is what Pitkin refers to as 'standing for', and it can be further divided into two subcategories. The first of these is descriptive representation. In this case, the aim of representation is to depict the 'original' in the most accurate way possible. A descriptive representation allows us to draw 'conclusions about the represented, gather information about the represented, because it is in relevant ways *like* the represented' (Pitkin 1967: 81). One may think of a pass photo or a map: although human faces or landscapes may of course be depicted in a variety of ways and for many different purposes, what these descriptive representations arguably have in common is their intention to show something 'like it really is'.

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Another subclass of representation as 'standing for' is symbolic representation. Whereas descriptive representations tend to have a material referent, which can be represented in a more or less accurate way, symbols 'are often said to represent something, to make it present by their presence, although it is not really present in fact' (Pitkin 1967: 92). Think, for example, of a national flag: in most cases, flags do not clearly convey any concrete information about their referent (i.e. a nation-state, its citizens or territory, or a national identity). They rather serve to arouse certain feelings or emotions, or to invoke particular associations (Pitkin 1967: 99). In consequence, symbols may be understood to be co-constructive of their own referent: they bring something into being that did not exist as such, prior to (or independently of) its symbolisation. Pitkin's criterion of 'responsiveness' thus cannot apply here, since the represented as we know it at least partially originates in the representative relation itself. Whereas representation as 'acting for' and descriptive representation both imply that there is an objective and autonomous referent whose interests can be represented in a more or less accurate way, representation as a symbolic 'standing for' suggests that the referent does not exist independently, but is brought into being precisely through the articulation of a representative claim or relation (Disch 2011b: 106–9).

Not all European languages seem to make such a distinction between representation as 'acting for' and 'standing for'. English, Spanish and French only have one term to refer to both (*representation*, *representación* and *représentation*, respectively). Even in the (predominantly Anglophone) academic debate on political representation, these various concepts are regularly mixed up. However, both at a theoretical and a practical level, there are important reasons to maintain a conceptual distinction between them. Pitkin asserts that both descriptive and symbolic forms of 'standing for' are largely irrelevant for our understanding of representative democracy (Pitkin 1967: 107–11). In fact, she holds that symbolic representation is particularly dangerous as it does not require any kind of responsiveness between the representative and the represented. But representation as 'standing for' is arguably more elementary to our understanding of democracy than Pitkin suggests. In a parliamentarian context, for instance, a certain measure of descriptive resemblance between representatives and their constituency or support base may significantly contribute to the experienced legitimacy or effectiveness of democratic representation (Mansbridge 1999). And many radical

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democrats insist that the role of symbolic representation should also not be disregarded (Disch 2019; Laclau 2005a: 159–61). In fact, as I will argue below, this symbolic conception of representation as 'standing for' is of particular relevance for our understanding of contemporary protest movements and prefigurative democracy.

What is the political relevance of symbolic representation? Constructivist theorists of democracy such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Michael Saward have sought to understand how political representatives give rise to new political discourses and identities. As argued above, it is precisely this constitutive aspect that characterises symbolic representation: the representative relation partially precedes its own referent. Seen from such a constructivist perspective, then, representation is not a one-way street, but a back-and-forth between representatives and the constituency or support base. By articulating a particular image of 'whom' or what they stand for, representative agents precisely give rise to such a social group or constituency. This is why, according to Saward (2010: 15), 'the active making of symbols or images of what is to be represented' is even a 'central aspect' of political representation. Saward therefore conceptualises political representation as a claim, which is made in reference to a particular object and whose validity must be recognised by an audience in order to be effective (Saward 2010: 37). Pitkin's normative criterion of responsiveness hence does not apply here: rather than merely resembling an already-existing support base, representatives greatly contribute to the constitution of such groups. Since the legitimacy of a representative claim mostly depends on the extent to which it is acknowledged as such, no formal mandate is required for it to be recognised as valid. This also significantly broadens our understanding of representative agents. In principle, anyone can make such claims: politicians and political parties, but also activists, social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media pundits and personalities, or even commercial enterprises (Saward 2010: 16).

But if symbolic representation indeed plays an elementary role in the constitution or self-identification of the represented, as these constructivist theorists claim, then does this mean that the represented has no material reality or autonomy prior to the representative relation? Saward admits that, evidently, 'there is always a *referent*. But the real political work lies in the active constitution of constituencies – the making of representations' (Saward 2010: 51). It may thus be more accurate to say that symbolic representation is

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an articulatory process (Laclau 1990b: 38–9; 2007a: 98). Through its repeated use, a signifier gradually acquires a certain content and meaning and comes to inscribe a referent with a different meaning or new connotations. This is a distinctively political process, one may add, because there is always a competition between various possible articulations. The establishment of one discourse or collective identity inevitably comes at the expense of others. Or, to put it in Laclau and Mouffe's terms: any symbolic representation seeks to acquire political hegemony insofar as it comes to 'dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 112). It thus follows that no representative claim or demand can stand on its own. In order to be meaningful and politically effective, it must be absorbed into a broader range of claims, demands, agendas or identities that gradually come to presuppose or connote each other. This is what Laclau and Mouffe describe as the creation of an 'equivalential chain': a series of demands that together constitute a counter-hegemonic discourse. This chain is in turn represented by one particular signifier that has the potential to stand for or invoke all the others (Laclau 2005a: 131). This is, for instance, how the colour green could gradually come to stand for a range of different political demands or agendas: from concerns with climate change and deforestation, to vegetarianism and opposition to nuclear energy, or even pacifism. In itself, 'green' is an empty and politically meaningless symbol. It merely invokes loose associations with the natural environment, or with plants and forests in particular. Yet, in that capacity, it has effectively served to link these various demands into an equivalential chain and to establish a web of connotations, associations and alliances that did not hitherto exist. 'Green' thus plays a constitutive role in the establishment of this agenda – and, consequently, offers an important source of identification for those who subscribe to it (even though, at a more detailed level, they may still have very different conceptions of what it means to be 'green').

In short, whenever it is claimed – rightly or not – that the practices of recent occupy movements, or prefigurative democracy more generally, imply a critique of political representation per se (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014; Lorey 2020), then one question that should be raised is what exact conception of 'representation' is meant here. Are we speaking about representation in the sense of *Vertretung* or *vertegenwoordiging* – that is, 'acting for' someone else on the basis of a formal mandate? Or do we mean, instead, representation as a more

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symbolic and often informal claim to 'stand for' someone or something else? Of course, in practice this distinction may not be as clear-cut as presented above. Not only are representation as 'acting for' and 'standing for' often employed in tandem, but one may even argue that one often cannot do without the other: in order to effectively act on behalf of someone else, one may also need to embody them, at least to a certain extent. Conversely, a successful claim to 'stand for' a larger group may entail that one's actions or statements have a bearing on this larger group (or its social and political position) in practice – in which case one inevitably (and perhaps unintentionally) also ends up 'acting for' them. But drawing such conceptual distinctions may help to acquire a better understanding of how political representation plays a role in various political practices, including those of recent occupy movements. Upon closer inspection, it turns out that certain forms of representation as 'standing for' may be more elementary to our understanding of prefigurative democracy than representation as 'acting for' (although some forms of the latter may as well be implied here). In the next section I will briefly discuss both in the context of recent occupy movements.

The Occupy Movements and Political Representation

At first sight, there may be good reasons to assume that recent occupy movements were categorically opposed to any form of political representation. They often had a critique of electoral-representative democracy in its current state – although the intensity and nature of this critique may differ from case to case. Established political parties often played no role in these movements, and there generally was a strong distrust of elected representatives who claim to act in the name or interest of the people. What is more, these movements experimented with alternative forms of organisation and horizontalist decision-making procedures. This suggests that these movements dismissed some forms of representation as 'acting for' – at least to the extent that this would require an exclusive mandate to act on the behalf of others and preclude their participation in political decision-making. Such a conception of 'acting for' is implied in electoral representation. But, as argued above, it may be too easy to argue that these movements were against any form of political representation – either as 'acting for' or 'standing for'. In fact, it appears that they employed various forms of both within their own prefigurative practices and discourses.

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To begin with, and notwithstanding their critique of electoral-representative government, most recent occupy movements did not dismiss any form of representation as 'acting for'. They, for instance, employed forms of delegation. As we have seen in the previous chapter, a few months into the occupation of Zuccotti Park, OWS's General Assembly was gradually replaced as the most important organ of decision-making by a spokescouncil. Each working group or committee would delegate a spokesperson to participate on its behalf in these central spokescouncil meetings. In itself, this is by no means incompatible with the radical-democratic aspirations of these occupy movements. Most anarchists and radical democrats agree that a more decentralised or horizontalist form of democracy may nevertheless require some forms of recallable delegation or imperative mandate (Bookchin 2015: 26; Cohn 2006: 255–6; Teivainen 2016: 23; Tomba 2018; Wilson 2014: 147–8). It is also often suggested that there is a qualitative difference between delegation and political representation in the strict sense (Castoriadis 1993: 260). Unlike representatives, who have a formal mandate to act or decide on the basis of those represented, delegates would only be entitled to 'communicate the will of the smaller group' (Bray 2013: 88). But arguably, this is mostly a matter of semantics. It may be more accurate to say that delegation is a very minimal form of representation as 'acting for', as it requires a limited and closely circumscribed mandate, in which the representative is considered subordinate to the represented (Pitkin 1967: 134). It clearly is the case that delegates or spokespersons 'act for' a larger group – albeit perhaps in a very restricted sense.

Besides formal delegation, moreover, it is also questionable to what extent the prefigurative practices of recent occupy movements were indeed entirely devoid of more informal leadership relations. It is argued that the emergence of new, networked forms of communication and social media would cater to horizontalist forms of organisation and coordination that are entirely devoid of leadership. But these emerging technologies also seem to have given rise to new kinds of informal leadership in a social movement context (Gerbaudo 2012: 159; Nunes 2014; Smucker 2017: 184–6). As even the most self-proclaimed 'leaderless' movements often fail to live up to this self-image in practice, it may thus be counter-productive (or even dangerous) to ignore the many forms of informal leadership that tend to play a role in social movements. The risk, after all, is that de facto leaders could otherwise not be held accountable for

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their choices and performance (Freeman 1972). The real challenge for prefigurative movements thus may not be to abolish leadership or representation in its every kind, but instead to think of ways in which such roles can be rotated more frequently and distributed more equally (Nunes 2021: 180). Rather than wishing away forms of 'acting for', it would be more democratic to acknowledge and formalise at least some of them as an essential part of social movements politics.

What is more, it could be argued that recent occupy movements also fulfilled an important representative role in their own right. They surely did not have – or, for that matter, claimed to have – any mandate or legitimacy to act, negotiate or make decisions on behalf of a larger group of people. But nevertheless, OWS and similar occupy movements did claim to serve as its political representatives in at least some respects. As Jodi Dean rightly insists, OWS was never 'actually the movement of 99 percent of the population of the United States (or the world) against the top 1 percent. It [was] a movement mobilizing itself around an occupied Wall Street *in the name of* the 99 percent' (Dean 2012: 229; see also Žižek 2012: 88–9). It appears that many of the involved activists were very much aware of this. Whereas the established political parties represent the 1%, David Graeber writes, OWS sought to 'represent the 99% whose lives are essentially left out of the equation' (2013: 40).

This gives rise to the question of how these occupy movements could legitimately function as the representatives of a '99%' – or of 'the nation' or 'the people' in other contexts? After all, they did not receive any mandate to act or decide on its behalf. In order to appreciate this, we need to return to the second, more symbolic concept of 'representation' that I fleshed out above: namely, representation as a symbolic 'standing for'. A social movements politics without any form of symbolic representation is practically unimaginable. Logos, flags, slogans and banners evidently fulfil an important symbolic function. Not only do they communicate a message or demand to the public, but activists also derive a sense of identity and community from them. Even the most devoted anarchist, who may reject *any* form of institutional representation, would surely not deny that their own black flag or their Guy Fawkes mask 'stand for' something (Cohn 2006).

The occupy movements of the past decade were no exception to this. Let me once again return to OWS's statement quoted above. As established, the statement is critical of electoral-representative

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democracy in its current condition. But the text *also* adamantly states that 'we the people still know our power' (New York City General Assembly 2011: 1). And this 'we the people' – a loaded phrase in US political history – at least implies that the General Assembly issuing this statement claims to stand for a more encompassing 'people', and does not merely act in the name of those physically present in Zuccotti Park (Butler 2015: 177). More generally, many of these movements' most prominent slogans – such as 'We are the 99%' and 'They don't represent us!' – suggest that they claimed to stand for an 'us' that exceeded the amount of people assembled in the streets (Brito Vieira 2015: 506). Finally, the prefigurative practices of these movements arguably also implied a similar representative claim: the General Assembly, alternative decision-making procedures and organisational structures all 'stood for' a more encompassing view of what a more democratic society or its political institutions and procedures should be like. We can therefore recognise that a particular form of political representation as 'standing for' is presupposed in the practices, slogans and rhetoric of prefigurative democracy. Much like the various forms of 'acting for' discussed above, this symbolic form of political representation is compatible with the radical-democratic aspirations of these occupy movements. In fact, prefigurative democracy cannot be adequately conceptualised without it.

How, then, do prefigurative movements and practices fulfil this representative role? In his work on prefigurative politics, Benjamin Franks offers an interesting suggestion. What distinguishes prefiguration as a form of political action is that it already 'contains elements of the object it is representing. It stands both as a practical response to a given situation, but also as a symbol of the larger vision of societal change' (Franks 2003: 20). In consequence, prefiguration has a very distinctive symbolic form: it is synecdochal. As I will explain further below, the synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a constitutive part stands in for a larger whole. Whereas prefiguration entails the realisation of political alternatives in the here and now, Franks argues, such experimental practices do represent a broader image of the desired future (2003: 18–19; 2014: 63). One may think of squatting as a typically prefigurative form of protest. Whilst it is an effective way to provide those in need with affordable housing, squatting is also a form of protest against housing shortage and speculation with real estate. Squatting is prefigurative and synecdochal: it is a partial (and temporary) solution that offers

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immediate relief in the present, but at the same time it addresses a more fundamental social injustice (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014: 3).

However, one may add to Franks's account that prefigurative movements and practices not only symbolically stand for a more encompassing ideal of the future. Prefigurative democracy also, and perhaps more importantly, tends to take place in the name of a particular social group or support base (such as 'the 99%' or the homeless people in a local community). How can the figure of the synecdoche be employed to make sense of this representative aspect in prefigurative democracy? Ernesto Laclau's constructivist theory of representation helps us to understand why and how the synecdochal form is often implied in prefigurative democracy and the politics of contemporary social movements.

Neither Metaphor nor Metonymy: Synecdochal Representation

Although the term 'representation' is often associated with 'acting for', representation as 'standing for' is much more common. Works of art, symbols, protocols or even means of payment all represent something larger than themselves. However, this symbolic form of representation also fulfils a distinctively political role. It is of elementary importance for the construction of collective identities and discourses. Whereas representation as 'acting for' is a typically responsive process, where a representative seeks to adequately and accurately act or speak on behalf of the represented; representation as 'standing for' is a 'two-way process: a movement from represented to representative, and a correlative one from representative to represented' (Laclau 2005a: 158; see also Laclau 2007a: 98). As argued, this is also a distinctively political process since, in order to establish itself, any identity must seek hegemony and thus come at the expense of others (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 141–5). When Ernesto Laclau speaks of 'political representation', he often implicitly refers to this much broader concept of representation as a symbolic 'standing for' (Arato 2013: 160).

As mentioned, an elementary aspect of Laclau's theory of representation is the synecdoche and its relation to the metaphor and the metonymy. By exploring the differences between these figures of speech Laclau hopes to better understand how hegemonic representations and discourses are being established (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 110). But he nowhere gives a systematic account of

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the synecdoche: references to it are scattered throughout his oeuvre. Before this concept can be applied to the representative claims and practices of recent occupy movements, we therefore first need to reconstruct the specific (and often implicit) place of the synecdoche in his theory of representation.

But let me first qualify what exactly the synecdoche *is*, how it is distinguished from other figures of speech such as the metaphor and the metonymy, and why it is relevant in a discussion of political representation. As the synecdoche is generally regarded as a subcategory of the metonymy (Desiriis 2015: 60), we must start by distinguishing between the metonymy and the metaphor. Whereas the latter is based on analogy or association, the establishment of the metonymy requires a *contiguous* relation. For example, in the context of radical social movements it is common to refer to police officers as 'pigs'. This is a metaphor: after all, the officers in question probably do not bear greater physical resemblance to pigs than anyone else. The relation between 'pigs' and 'police officers' is merely based on *association* – the perceived brutishness or thoughtlessness of their behaviour reminds us of animals. Whether this association is justified or not is irrelevant (it is common knowledge that pigs are highly intelligent animals). In metonymy, on the other hand, the relation between the signifier and the signified must be warranted by a particular *contiguity*: that is, a more immediate relation between the signifier and its referent. Common examples are 'Wall Street' or 'the White House' as references to the financial industry or to a particular branch of the United States government, respectively. In both cases there is a direct and concrete relation between them (the stock market is perceived as the centre of financial power; the president lives in the White House), but the term used as a signifier is not exhaustive of this relation. Synecdoche, finally, implies a metonymic relation in that it is based on a similar contiguous relation. But there is one important, additional criterion: in a synecdochal relation the signifier is itself a constitutive part of the larger whole that it signifies. It requires a *pars pro toto* relation. Expressions such as 'we have hungry mouths to feed' or the use of 'wheels' as a reference to automobiles are famous examples of a synecdoche: 'mouths' and 'wheels' obviously are merely a part of their referent – albeit an elementary one.

Let me return to the distinction between metonymy and metaphor. As stated, metaphors are typically based on associations. But this also means that metaphorical representation can only

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be established as a more or less exclusive, closed relation (Laclau 2014d: 88). Precisely because it is based on mere association, many different metaphors can be constructed to describe a single referent. To return to the example given above: there is no particular reason why the contingent association between the police and 'pigs' has led to such an established metaphor in activist and youth culture (various species could have fulfilled the same metaphorical role, and arguably even better than that). But in order to succeed as a metaphor, 'pigs' had to exclude these other possible associations, and thus had to present itself as the *only* or most self-evident signifier for 'the police'. Precisely because it is contingent – and, thus, one among many options – a metaphor needs to be continuously reinforced in order to become effective.

This is different for the metonymy – which, as we have seen, is based on a contiguous relation. The part that serves as a signifier in a metonymic relation is more closely related to the whole that it embodies, and the contiguous relation between them thus 'speaks for itself'. Everyone with a rudimentary knowledge of US politics will immediately understand what 'the White House' or 'Washington' stand for – both terms, moreover, can readily be used in reference to the same referent. Thus, the success of metonymy depends less on its ability to exclude other possible symbolic relations: it remains more 'open'. As far as Laclau is concerned, however, this also means that the metonymy has only limited potential for the establishment of hegemonic discourses and representations. In a process of hegemonisation, a particular representation of society gradually takes upon itself the role of serving as a dominant representation of society as a whole. It must 'overflo[w] its own particularity' and become an 'incarnation' (Laclau 2007b: 72) – or, a complete and full embodiment of a social totality that always remains an impossibility (Laclau 1990b: 38–9). The problem with metonymies, however, is that they are loosely based on one of many possible contiguous relations. Unlike the metaphor, the effectiveness of a metonymy does not depend on its ability to make all other possible representations redundant. Metonymies thus lack the exclusionary potential that is required for the establishment of a hegemonic political representation (Torfing 1999: 112–13). In order to acquire discursive hegemony, a metonymy would first need to lose some of its contiguous openness (Laclau 2005a: 109; 2014b: 62).

This is where the figure of the synecdoche becomes relevant. Laclau ascribes a particular function to this rhetorical figure. He

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approvingly quotes Paul de Man, who describes the synecdoche as 'one of the borderline figures that creates an ambivalent zone between metaphor and metonymy' (De Man 1979: 63n8; see also Laclau 2014d: 87). Seen from this perspective, the synecdoche is not merely a subcategory of the metonymy: rather, it occupies a middle ground between these other figures, in that it constitutes a relation between signifier and signified that is neither contiguous nor analogous – and, therefore, neither open nor closed. The particular part that 'takes upon itself the task' (Miller 2004: 220) to embody or 'stand for' a larger whole is never the *only* part that could fulfill this role (Laclau 2000a: 57; Laclau et al. 1999: 135). Yet, its chance of succeeding as a synecdochal signifier does depend on its ability to be presented as the only (or, at least, the most obvious and self-evident) representation. The synecdochal representation creates the *illusion* of a closure (Laclau 2014d: 87–8).

As far as Laclau is concerned, this is exactly why the rhetorical figure of the synecdoche forms the ultimate basis for our understanding of political representation: it explains how one representative claim or relation can signify a larger whole – which, at the same time, must always exceed it (Laclau 2005a: 72; Desiriis 2015: 60–1, 216). The synecdochal form avoids both the Scylla of metonymic arbitrariness and the Charybdis of metaphoric closure. For Laclau it is therefore 'not simply one more rhetorical device, simply to be taxonomically added to other figures such as metaphor and metonymy, but [it] has a different ontological function' (Laclau 2005a: 72). And this function is to articulate hegemonic concepts of the social that will never be exhaustive, complete or even fully possible (Laclau 2014d: 97), but which will nevertheless present themselves as the embodiments of this social whole – and thus serve to constitute it.[1] Laclau's employment of these rhetorical figures thus should be taken literally, and not as mere analogies. Political representations are constructed *as* synecdoches – not merely *like* them.

Let me give two different examples of how this might work in practice. Imagine a local community whose members have a particular shared need or interest. It can be something rather mundane and seemingly unpolitical: in one of Laclau's own examples, citizens want a better bus connection to their neighbourhood (Laclau 2005b: 36). However, their request is turned down by the local authorities. As long as this remains an isolated case, Laclau argues, it will probably not give rise to a stronger counter-hegemonic mobilisation. But now let us imagine that this is only one among many

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different unsatisfied claims. It turns out that similar requests from other neighbourhood residents or surrounding communities have also been denied. Laclau describes how this may lead to the institution of a social frontier: their shared experience of neglect or their frustration with the authorities in question bring people together and constitute a sense of collectivity, which is counterpoised to a shared understanding or appreciation of the authorities that come to serve as its 'constitutive outside' (Laclau 1990b: 17; Marchart 2007: 139). The construction of a social frontier not only affects how these communities identify, but leads to a different articulation of their demands. It results in the establishment of a larger set of claims, 'one in which all the demands, in spite of their differential character, tend to reaggregate themselves, forming what we will call an *equivalential chain*' (Laclau 2005b: 37). Notwithstanding the initial differences between these people and their particular interests, needs or preferences, their shared experience of neglect and their positioning along the lines of a newly constituted social frontier leads them to see a seemingly 'logical' or 'natural' connection between these various claims and demands. This chain of equivalence, however, needs to be represented in a particular way: a mere summing up of these various demands will not be sufficient. The representation of an equivalential chain 'is only possible if a particular demand, without entirely abandoning its own particularity, starts also functioning as a signifier representing the chain as a totality' (Laclau 2005b: 39; see also Marchart 2019: 111–16). By virtue of its public appeal or its broad applicability, one particular demand (for instance for better public transport) comes to synecdochally represent the entire chain, thus 'standing for' a more encompassing series of demands or identities.[2]

Let us turn to a second example of synecdochal representation in the context of social movements. Imagine a trade union that seeks to organise in a working-class neighbourhood with strong racial and cultural diversity. Initially, the union's campaigns will focus on social-economic issues and working conditions. But it turns out that this community is also suffering from an increase in racist violence, and there are no other grassroots organisations focusing on such issues. It is likely that, through lack of an alternative, the union will gradually start to play a more significant role in this struggle as well. As Laclau (2005a: 109) argues, 'despite the differential particularism of the initial two kinds of struggles and demands, a certain equivalential homogeneity between them is being created'.

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Consequently, the perceived meaning of the trade union might gradually change. Although there are obvious connections between these struggles, there is no particular reason why a trade union should necessarily be engaged in anti-racism. And yet, 'the union' comes to synecdochally stand for a larger chain of demands, struggles and identities, including racial equality and anti-racism. Neighbourhood residents and potential members may thus start to associate 'trade union' with 'anti-racism' and vice versa. The union eventually comes to represent a much larger group than its original rank and file or the workers in a particular trade or branch.

This example illustrates how an organisation gradually acquires a much broader representative role – but without losing its particularity at the same time (the trade union in Laclau's example may continue to advocate good working conditions). It is important to stress that this does not only affect the concrete demands, agenda or function of the organisation. It is also has a bearing on how the organisation comes to identify or understand itself: 'trade union' does not merely refer to its concrete function or mission, but also more broadly to a collective identity, a particular articulation of 'social justice', 'equality' or other values and ideals, and a strategic view of how these must be brought about.

The Occupy Camp as a Synechoche

How can Laclau's concept of synecdochal representation help to better understand the prefigurative practices and representative role of recent occupy movements?[3] Let me analyse three features of prefigurative democracy that have a significant synecdochal form. Prefigurative democracy often entails the articulation of representative claims, the creation or reappropriation of commons, and experimentation with participative democracy and decision-making. These aspects may obviously play out differently, depending on social, cultural and political context. But they are exemplary for how social movements seek to change society and its political form through the prefigurative realisation and representation of their ultimate goals, within their discourses as well as their activist and organisational practices. Moreover, these three features illustrate how the form and substance of prefigurative democracy are closely intertwined in practice.

A first feature of prefigurative democracy that has important synecdochal implications is that it always entails the articulation of

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a representative claim. Of course, this is by no means exceptional for prefigurative democracy: such claims are arguably made in any political context. What renders it particularly important in this context, however, is that this idea of the representative claim offers an alternative to electoral forms of representation as 'acting for', which many of these movements indeed rejected. Unlike parliamentary bodies or elected officials, social movements like OWS or the 15-M movement clearly did not act on the basis of a formal mandate. Saward's concept of the representative claim may help us to understand how they nevertheless fulfilled a representative function – in their experimental practices as much as through their slogans and rhetoric (Saward 2010: 16).

As argued above, representative claims are not 'responsive' to an already-existing subject or support base. They are made in anticipation of their approval or recognition by an audience. It is precisely for this reason that representative claims fulfil a constitutive role: they contribute to the gradual articulation of shared political discourses and collective identities. Take for example OWS's most famous rallying cry: 'We are the 99%'. This slogan was inspired by Joseph Stiglitz's (2011) article in *Vanity Fair*, in which he argued that a mere 1% of US Americans receives nearly a quarter of the nation's yearly income, and that it owns 40% of the nation's total wealth. A blog on Tumblr contributed to the popularisation of this idea that society could be divided between a 99% and a 1% (Graeber 2013: 41).[4] On this website, thousands of people, mostly from the United States, posted pictures of themselves, accompanied by a brief statement that described their individual situation: testimonies of debt, unemployment or systematic underemployment, poverty, chronic illness and war trauma. These were all undersigned with the slogan 'I am the 99%'. Although these were all individual accounts of many different situations and experiences, the slogan suggested that all these stories had something important in common. It seemed that, in a way, every single personal story could embody or encompass all the others – they all represented the entire '99%'. Whereas this idea of the '99%' suggests that they together constituted a majority, the *I* in 'I am the 99%' also suggested a synecdochal, representative claim: *my* story is representative of what we all are going through (in spite of the obvious differences between us). In this way, the slogan and the idea of a '99%' constructed what Laclau and Mouffe call an 'equivalential chain' between various stories and identities, on the basis of a relatively vague and undefined experience that they all

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seemed to have in common. This shared experience, which perhaps could best be described in terms of 'deprivation' or 'precarity', came to synecdochally represent a wide variety of concrete inequalities, instabilities and injustices – and thus gave rise to a newly articulated collective class identity (Dean 2014: 385).

Countless social movement slogans have fulfilled a similar synecdochal role. When OWS protesters claimed that 'This is what democracy looks like', they referred to their own experimental practices and forms of organisation as a synecdochal embodiment of the social and political conditions that they sought to bring about. When revolutionaries in Egypt chanted 'The people want the fall of this regime', they not only opened up the collective imagination to the possibility of a country without military dictatorship. They also gave rise to a new understanding of who these 'people' may be – thus inscribing the term with new meaning. Of course, this slogan was used well before a significant part (let alone a majority) of 'the people' was actually ready to subscribe to its message. It thus presupposed a popular desire that may not have existed at that moment. But it was precisely by treating the aspirations of a politicised minority as a synecdochal embodiment of the popular will as a whole that the revolutionaries would eventually be able to muster sufficient support for revolutionary change. This representative claim thus was prefigurative of 'a people' that would only emerge in response to it – much as OWS gave rise to the very '99%' that it claimed to represent.

Another feature of prefigurative democracy that has a significant synecdochal function is the production or reappropriation of commons. Originally associated with land and other natural recourses, today the term 'commons' is used in reference to a much broader range of spaces, infrastructures and means of production – as well as immaterial entities such as ideas, symbols, language and so forth (Hardt 2010: 350; Hardt and Negri 2009: viii). Commons belong to no one and to everyone: they defy the logic of (private as well as public) property. In a world dominated by neoliberal politics and a capitalist mode of production, commons thus both produce and symbolise what a radically different economy and political order might be like. They have an important prefigurative potential (Van de Sande 2017). At the same time, and in part because of this, commons are also continuously at risk of being appropriated or subsumed under a capitalist logic. The reappropriation of commons from capitalist control thus is both a political goal and

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a means or strategy for many contemporary radical-democratic movements.

One concrete example of how the production of commons played a role in the prefigurative politics of recent occupy movements is the fact that they all revolved around the occupation of squares, streets and other public spaces. In recent decades public space (both in the literal sense of a physical space, and in the more abstract sense of a public sphere) has become increasingly inaccessible. Neoliberal governments and policies all across the world have privatised such spaces – a development that in many ways corresponds with the establishment of an empty and watered-down concept of citizenship. For many recent occupy movements the occupation of public space thus was not merely a strategic instrument. The reappropriated public space *itself* was also often at stake (Butler 2015: 126). As Wendy Brown argues, many occupy movements around the world 'repossessed private space as public space, occupied what is owned, and above all, rejected the figure of citizenship reduced to sacrificial human capital and neoliberal capitalism as a life-sustaining sacred power' (Brown 2015: 220). For instance, Istanbul's Gezi Park was initially occupied in defiance of the city's plan to restructure it – and, more generally, to protest against the regime's attitude towards its citizens' right of assembly and freedom of press. New York's Zuccotti Park, to name another example, is not only conveniently located only a few blocks from Wall Street, but it is also a 'privately owned public space' (Foderaro 2011) that bears the name of its proprietor. Of course, occupying a single square will do very little to turn the tide against the privatisation of public space. But by focusing on the reappropriation of public space these various social movements embodied a broader protest – against the privatisation of public spaces, evidently, but also more generally against the ongoing enclosure of commons. The occupation of public space thus also synecdochally stood for a broader opposition against neoliberal appropriation, and arguably even for a more encompassing view of how a commons-based economy could replace the current capitalist one.

A third feature of prefigurative democracy that has important synecdochal implications is that it often entails experimentation with participatory forms of democratic organisation and decision-making. Ironically, it is precisely for this reason that prefigurative democracy is so often assumed to imply a rejection of political representation *tout court*. But especially in a context where 'democracy' is

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generally associated with electoral representation and parliamentarianism, experiments with participatory or 'direct' forms of democracy inevitably also do represent something in their own right. They synecdochally stand for a general (and continuously rearticulated) idea of what a more democratic society could look like.

A concrete realisation of this aspect can be found in the General Assemblies and consensus-oriented decision-making techniques of recent occupy movements. These experimental practices and procedures not only served an important organisational function. The continuous search for consensus at General Assemblies, for example, well exceeded their instrumental or strategic purposes. As Andy Cornell argues, '[i]n this case, the whole that consensus stands for is a participatory, egalitarian, self-determining movement, on the one hand, and, on the other, a society with the same characteristics' (Cornell 2012: 164). Graeber makes a similar point when he argues that OWS's direct-democratic decision-making procedures and horizontalist structures were understood to 'offer a *model*, or at the very least a glimpse of how free people might organize themselves, and therefore what a free society could be like' (Graeber 2013: 233; see also 43, 191–1). The synecdochal character of these democratic experiments was not limited to their procedural or organisational form. Habits, hand signals and other symbols – the 'jazz hands' signal to indicate agreement, the 'people's mic' as a way to communicate in a large group without using amplification – play an equally important role in this synecdochal enactment. This does not mean that these occupy movements always consistently used, or claimed to use, direct-democratic decision-making procedures. As we have seen above, their activist repertoire often also comprised various forms of representation as 'acting for', and many of these movements later turned to establish a more formal and vertically organised council system. But the point is that these experimental forms and practices, notwithstanding their limited and short-lived character, stood for a more encompassing view of what a more democratic society might look like. They also fulfilled a constitutive function: without its experimental enactment, both in procedures or organisational structures and in habits or rhetoric, these movements' ideal of a more democratic society would remain unarticulated and empty.

As the various features of prefigurative democracy in practice illustrate, it is impossible to even imagine it without any form of political representation. This is all the more so the case because, regardless of how they appreciate electoral-representative democracy

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in its current state, the practices of social movements must always be discursively mediated. How exactly their practices and organisational structures 'stand for' a more encompassing social ideal can only find expression through language, memes, images or symbols. The occupation of public space, the implementation of consensus-oriented decision-making procedures and the prefigurative realisation of new organisational structures could acquire a synecdochal meaning precisely *because* they were accompanied by – and, thus, mediated through – particular representative claims, demands, slogans and symbols. The point of the matter, in other words, is not simply that the synecdochal figure of speech serves as a helpful analogy for how these practices symbolically represent something larger than themselves: prefigurative action is not *like* a synecdoche. More accurately, these social movements show why political representation is essentially prefigurative in its own right. It is partially through their slogans, claims and statements that political agents give rise to a shared idea of who it is they symbolically stand for. In this way, as we have seen, representatives also play an elementary role in the constitution of their own support base or constituency. By claiming to stand for a larger whole – be it a particular goal or demand, an ideal of the future society, or indeed a particular social group or even 'the people' – representatives already presuppose the existence of a shared discourse or identity that must first be articulated through their own representative claims (Saward 2010: 67). A part or minority that claims to stand for a larger whole or majority thus partially co-constitutes the latter. Political representation is itself prefigurative in that it is always ahead of itself: it gives shape to a social and political reality that did not exist prior to its own articulation.

Conclusion: Participatory or Representative Democracy?

What is the role and relevance of political representation in the practices of recent occupy movements? Since their emergence in the course of the past decade, this has been a subject of debate among political theorists and social movement scholars. Many advocates as well as critics of these movements have argued that their horizontalist aspirations, their radical-democratic rhetoric and their prefigurative approach all evince a principled rejection of political representation. But although many of these movements indeed shared a critique of electoral-representative democracy in its current state, I argued, it is an exaggeration to state that their prefigurative

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practices evinced a 'presentist' (Lorey 2014) or 'post-representative' (Tormey 2015) view of democracy. In fact, it could be argued that prefigurative democracy requires a very specific – and, indeed, inherently prefigurative – form of political representation.

Drawing a conceptual distinction between representation as 'acting for' and representation as 'standing for' allows us to better understand its role in prefigurative democracy. As argued above, the prefigurative practices of recent occupy movements entailed various forms of both. Spokespersons, councils or working groups were delegated to 'act for' the movement as a whole – albeit on the basis of a limited mandate. But, more importantly, these movements also fulfilled an important representative function in their own right. By articulating representative claims, reappropriating public spaces and experimenting with participatory democracy and horizontal forms of organisation, they not only synecdochally stood for a larger 'people', but also articulated a more encompassing idea of what a future society and its political forms might look like. The part representing a larger whole thus also inscribed the latter with a particular meaning and association. Synecdochal representation is prefigurative in its own right, in the sense that it already presupposes the existence of a referent that must be co-constituted in the representative claim itself. It refers to a particular conception of 'the people' or 'the 99%' – or, more generally, to a social and political condition – before it can be recognised or acknowledged as a legitimate representative claim. In that sense, synecdochal representations like the ones that emerged in Zuccotti Park and other occupied spaces thus may also be interpreted as the representations of a not-yet-established future (Žižek 2012: 128).

Employing the synecdoche in the context of prefigurative democracy thus gives rise to an understanding of political representation that is not based on any formal mandate and does not restrict the ability of citizens to partake in democratic politics. Synecdochal claims can in principle be made by anyone, as their validity can only be recognised afterwards. Prefigurative democracy thus caters to a completely different conception of political representation than what is afforded by electoral-representative democracy. We may thus conclude that, rather than dismissing political representation per se, prefigurative democracy reconciles certain forms of representative politics with participatory democracy.

This idea has in fact become more widespread in the recent debate. Several studies suggest that occupy movements such as OWS

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and 15-M emerged from a contingent combination of representative as well as participatory forms of democracy. Paolo Gerbaudo argues that they comprised two different strands or tendencies. On the one hand, there was the obvious but limited influence of what he calls 'neo-anarchists', who insisted on prefigurative experimentation and horizontalist organisation as way to establish 'real democracy' in the here and now. Seen from this perspective, the activist tent camp and its bodies of decision-making were not merely the strategic means for political change, but also an end in itself. But another group of participants saw their movement or the activist tent camp as the expression of a demand for public sovereignty. For them, the occupied square was primarily a stage or mouthpiece by which to voice the discontent of a broader public. According to Gerbaudo (2017: 160), these neo-anarchist and populist tendencies 'clashed with one another in the everyday life of the camp, leading to different interpretations of the meaning of the occupations and of the movements they incubated'. OWS activist and political organiser Jonathan Smucker draws a similar distinction between two dominant tendencies within the movement. Whereas in his opinion the prefigurative tendency was more visibly present in the politics of OWS, there was also a strategic impulse of those who argued that a social movement must seek to acquire discursive hegemony and institutional power to be successful in the long term (Smucker 2017: 118–25). Although Smucker recognises the worth of prefigurative experimentation, he concludes that it can only be productive to the extent that it complements such a hegemony-oriented social movement strategy. In the practice of OWS, however, it often replaced or even undermined any strategic attempt to acquire political power (Smucker 2017: 122).

A slightly different position is taken by Cristina Flesher Fominaya in the context of the Spanish 15-M movement. Although 15-M initially comprised anarchist and autonomist groups as well as activists with stronger populist or neo-Gramscian inclinations, the movement eventually came 'close to successfully integrating these two positions' (Flesher Fominaya 2020: 15). Many 15-M activists ended up combining a prefigurative approach within their own movements with a strategic attempt to acquire discursive hegemony and institutional power outside of it (Flesher Fominaya 2020: 304). Flesher Fominaya's observation resonates with a recent development in the academic debate on social movement politics, as philosophers have also tried to overcome this binary distinction between 'horizontal'

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and 'vertical' logics of organisation at a theoretical level (Feenstra et al. 2017: 7–9). Rodrigo Nunes seeks to understand social movement politics as a diverse 'ecology' that comprises various, and potentially complementary, organisational forms and logics. Rather than trying to 'force a choice between self- and hetero-organisation, "purely" horizontal and "purely" vertical relations', Nunes (2021: 48) argues, we should start from the assumption that 'plurality is a given, which means that the question of organisation is never about the one organisational form or the one organisation' (Nunes 2021: 49). It follows that individual movements, organisations or activists within such a diverse ecology may not only employ a variety of tactics, but also pursue very different goals. Once social movements let go of the idea that they should always seek to be in control of the direction in which they are heading, Nunes suggests, it may become possible for movement actors with divergent aims or backgrounds to work towards the same horizon (Nunes 2021: 172). In a similar vein, Rahel Süß (2021) has sought to overcome the binary distinction between verticalism and horizontalism by focusing on the role of experimentation in a social movement politics. As both the means and goals of political action are continuously rearticulated throughout practice, there will always and inevitably be conflicting ideas on what goals should be pursued or on how to get there. Such conflicts, however, may as well be understood as an intrinsic part of a democratic social movement politics.

I am inclined to take a similar position. However, rather than it being a part of a diverse 'ecology' that comprises both prefigurative or horizontalist forms of organisation on the one hand, and a verticalist logic of representation on the other, I assert that prefigurative democracy precisely emerges from an encounter between them. Prefigurative democracy has typically horizontal features in that it accommodates participatory decision-making, direct-democratic organisation at a grassroots level, and decentralised 'bottom-up' forms of organisation. But it is also vertical in the sense that it requires the articulation of representative claims that do not appeal to an already-existing support base, but which instead are co-constitutive of their own referent. One thus has to take the initiative to stand for, and to speak or even act on behalf of, others – albeit without a formal mandate. Prefiguration and representation are by no means incompatible: the former presupposes the latter. In fact, symbolic political representation has a prefigurative element in that it anticipates a referent which must first be inscribed with a

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particular meaning. As contemporary social movements and their prefigurative practices combine aspects of verticalism and horizontalism, this suggests that we are 'not witnessing the end of representative politics but living through an era in which the ecology of representation is changing, becoming more complex and more dispersed' (Feenstra et al. 2017: 96).

Understanding how prefigurative democracy entails the articulation of representative claims also enables us to appreciate how prefigurative movements and practices continue to have an impact, long after the activist tent camps have been cleared out and the activists returned home. How to determine the measure of success that they have in the long term? Or is it at all possible to make such an assessment, based on the outcomes of a prefigurative practice or movement? This question will be addressed in the last chapter.

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